

**THE USE OF SPEECH ACTS AND THEIR COMMUNICATIVE
FUNCTIONS IN MEMORANDA OF AN ACADEMIC ORGANISATION**

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2010

Acknowledgment

My modest praises are for Allah, the most beneficial and the most knowledgeable and Holy Prophet(SAW) , the greatest source of inspiration.

Sincerest thanks to my supervisor, Ms. Shagufta Jabeen, for her keen guidance and unconditional support. She was always prepared to offer her advice and her assistance. She was unstinting in her encouragement. Her considerate nature gave me confidence in my potentials. I am highly thankful to her kindness and generous guidance.

Hearty prayers are for my beloved parents for their spiritual and psychological inspiration. Acknowledgement is incomplete without profound thanks to my sister and brothers who supported me in any respect during the completion of research.

I offer my blessings to my friends for their valuable insight and their suggestions. I am indebted to my colleagues for their significant contribution. I would like to pay gratitude to University of Management Sciences (UMT) and the staff for availing themselves to me. They have opened their hearts and their doors.

Finally, my heartiest thanks to the one closes to me, my dear husband for his moral support. His love, patience and encouragement gave me confidence and stability.

Abstract

The present research highlights the importance and significance of memoranda by analyzing its communicative function. It aims at finding the frequency of various kinds of speech acts in memoranda selected from three different sources. This research applies Driven and Verspoor (2004) Cognitive typology of speech acts that is quite contemporary and comprehensive. This research investigates the differences in use of speech acts in relation to the category of memos as well as the types of communication i.e. bottom up, top down and horizontal. The researcher selected 43 memos from business communication books and 132 memos for COMSATS institute Management Science Department. The researcher classified memos of various types and analysed the communicative function of memos through speech acts classification and examined the effect of the role of status. The research is significant as it applies speech act theory for the analysis of text used in academic organization. It would contribute the analysis of text in Pakistani context. Qualitative analysis of the data depicts the significance of memoranda in an academic organization. By analyzing the communicative functions of memoranda, it substantiates the importance of memoranda to pass information, to direct, to offer, to invite, to give warning, and to give recommendations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Communication studies as a part of discourse analysis is an emerging field. It is interesting to note in this perspective that the concept of information is neither restricted within science nor literature but encompasses the world of communication - the world of written communication. Workplace English as an integral part of written communication has gained significant position in the field of applied linguistic research. In today's world, a large number of people fill forms, write memos, letters or make reports. Such kinds of writings are purposeful social activities, purposeful in a sense that it serves to manifest a goal or intention and expresses a distinguished way of what is specifically known as 'making things happen through words'.

1.1 Background of the Research

Letters due to its widespread and its broad variety are mostly used for research purposes. Memoranda though emerging as a modern genre of writing are not researched much. This area is not much explored in Pakistani context. Memoranda (memos) are considered as a mode of communication within the organization. They form a dynamic nature of communication to convey messages, to pass information, to make policies and to give directions. The communicative function of memoranda can be best studied by applying speech acts theory which is considered to be one of the analytical instruments so far developed in descriptive interpretive

pragmatic. However, the theory has some drawbacks in the following area: locating frequency of speech acts and size of speech act realization forms. There are problems even in the classification of speech acts which poses problems for the researcher to categorize speech acts.

1.2 The aim of the Research

The present research investigates the communicative function of memoranda by applying speech act theory. The researcher finds frequency of various kinds of speech acts in memoranda. This research applies Driven & Verspoor (2004) Cognitive typology of speech acts that is quite contemporary and comprehensive. This theory associates communicative intention with speech acts. The types of speech acts are grouped together according to superordinate categories.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1.** What is the frequency of various kinds of speech acts in memoranda by applying Driven & Verspoor cognitive typology of speech acts?
- 2.** What are differences in use of speech acts in relation to the categories of memoranda?
- 3.** What are differences in use of speech acts used in two types of communication i.e. top down and horizontal?

1.4 Research Methodology

The researcher selected total 175 memos. 43 memos from Business Communication books and 132 memos for COMSATS institute. The researcher applied Driven& Verspoor (2004) theory of speech acts. The researcher classified memos of various types and analysed the communicative

function of memos through speech acts classification and examined the effect of the role of status.

1.5 Scope & significance of the Research

The research contributes the discourse analysis of workplace text. Discourse analysts would get benefit from this research by exploring workplace organizational communication, especially text taken from an academic organization.

This research is significant in the field of pragmatics by applying speech act theory for the discourse analysis of organizational text. It will be instrumental to bring to light the work done in the field of speech acts and will be beneficial for using a contemporary theory by Driven & Verspoor for analyzing speech acts.

The work can be utilized by English for Specific Purpose (ESP) trainers. It explores wide variety of memoranda, its types and its significance in Business English. It will be helpful for language and ESP teachers to utilize memos for research purpose as well as for study material. It will be helpful for designing the syllabus of functional English.

Workplace communication has become a recognized field; therefore, the exploration of workplace text used in Pakistani context will be useful. It will provide streamline for the future researchers to explore new direction in the discourse analysis of workplace communication.

1.6 Limitations and delimitations

Limitations and delimitations of research have been mentioned below.

- The research is conducted on the analysis of the memos taken from one institute and

analysis is comprised of 132 memos because of the limitations of time, resources and privacy policies. The communication flow is from top to bottom and horizontal.

- Office notes are taken from August 2009 to December 2009.
- The email memos are selected by keeping in mind the level of formality.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Firstly, this chapter highlights the work done on workplace text and in this context the significance of memos and; secondly, it deals with: speech acts theories, the application of speech act theories, and the drawbacks in speech act theories. This chapter proposes the significance of Driven& Verspoor Cognitive typology of speech act theory.

2.1. The analysis of workplace text

The study of workplace language has gained significant position in the field of applied linguistic research but Swales (2000) observed that as compare to other areas, it is not much explored. Some researchers (Iedema, 2000; Nickerson, 1999) worked in this area by selecting texts within a single organization and the focus was on intercultural communication and cross-cultural communication. Victoria University of Wellington (2009) conducted a study of communication based real interaction in New Zealand workplaces. The team completed a pilot study on the pragmatics of cross-cultural communication. The research was basically on the ways in which people from different social and cultural back-grounds perform communication acts such as complaints, refusals and disagreements (known as "negatively affective speech acts"). The study described the range of ways in which such speech acts are performed in different workplace contexts.

Vergaro (1996) investigated the difference in structure of writing discourse due to culture. He took an initial analysis corpus of authentic Italian and English money chasing letters and did micro and macro level analysis. Micro level analysis covers mood, reference system, modality and use of Meta discourse and for macro level analysis; he worked on the notion of move. Money chasing letters as well as requesting, offering and promoting sales letter perform a specific social action and are easily classified (Miller, 1984 cited in Vergaro, 1996). Mauranen (1993) explored the cultural differences in Finnish and English texts by using meta textual elements i.e. text connectives, code glosses, illocution markers, narrators, validity markers, attitude markers, commentaries. Some researchers analysed gendering in literacy practices (Kenyon, 1992; McMahon et al, 1994 cited in Barton & Hall, 2000). Many research works are centred around the discourse analysis of meeting, professional talks and on oral communication but it doesn't undermine the importance of written texts; as Iedema (2000) points out that written texts are often outcomes of spoken interactions and writing has remain a frequent activity in a variety of professions (Anderson, 1985).

Among all kind of business writings, Letter writing has widely spread in human societies and can be found in most domain of life. Gupta (1997) conducted a survey of technical Bachelor of Science degree graduates to find out: the practical usage of various course topics to their employment and the types of writing skills needed at the workplace. His findings show the ratio of writing memo was far greater than any other type of writing. Memos and business letters were written by 83.7% and 80.0% of the graduates respectively, proposals by 62.1%, progress reports by 57.3%, and procedural manuals by 48.9%. Executive summaries were written more

(35.1% of the time) than abstracts (21.9%). Stapa, Darus, Rizan, Maasum, & Mustaffa (2008) did research to discuss demands of workplace literacy and the levels of written literacy among applicant for a job. For writing task, they chose letter writing being one of the most recurrent types of writing.

Barton & Hall (2000) investigated a study on letters by viewing them as “social practice” and by analyzing texts, participants and the activities in their social context. Jung (2003) conducted research on Korean business correspondence to find out the degree to which meaning of an utterance is determined by the hearer’s pragmatic competence. Bargeila & Chaippini (1996) found variation in business correspondence (request letters) is due to interpersonal relations, social distances and classes. Mansour (2006) after comparing business letters written by Iranian and Native speakers concluded that Iranian business letter-writers mostly focus on surface linguistic aspects of English language while pragmatic aspects of language, such as using politeness strategies, are ignored in their letter writing. Letters have many forms i.e. memos, electronic mail, fax etc embedded with social situation, cultural beliefs, values and dialogues (Barton & Hall, 2000).

Letter ranges from general to specific, covers two worlds, the writer’s and the reader’s having specific diexis, referring to the writer and the intended reader and to the space and time. Letters have particular illocutionary force; the existence of the letter itself has meaning in addition to the context. The researcher found that numerous works are done on letter writing and memoranda are needed to be explored. Most of the professionals, who write letters, spend their time on four document types; and more on memos than any other document; memos 69%, short reports 59% and letters 56% (Anderson, 1985). The researcher explored the significance and

wide varieties of memos.

2.2. Significance of Memoranda

2.2.1. Memoranda, the Most Ubiquitous Genre

The term "memorandum" began to be used in the later 1870s and early 1880s, although it did not become common until the 1920s. Before the late nineteenth century, business letters were the primary source of communication and letters were the chief representative of rhetorical practices. The origin of the memo form to break with the old rhetoric, and to fashion new genres of writing became known even as late as 1929. Philip McDonald (cited in Guillory, 2003) complained in his *English and Science* about the way in which English was taught in the school; he saw it promoting obscurity and pomposity but McDonald means to impeach a rhetorical style. His conclusions favoured the continued segregation of technical writing from English departments (quoted in symposium, *memo and modernity*). In nineteenth century, there was an increase reliance on written as opposed to oral.

Popularity of memo in the present scenario is obvious as the need for recorded communication has increased over time. Organization grows and the problems of co-ordinates become more severe (Lahiff & Penress 1997). Unlike a conversation that contains very particular information, memos aptly transmit complex information (Yates 1989). They are systematic as they relay communication back and forth between departments or between the top and bottom of the organization. Guillory (2003) explored the generic features of information writings i.e. "Memoranda the most ubiquitous genre of modern world". The generic speciality of information writing can be understood by pointing it on epistemic axis: Literary / journalistic

...informational.... scholarly / scientific. Information is prevailing along the entire axis and it comprises of such mode of writing such as memo, form and report. Literary or journalistic and scholarly or scientific seem to be more interesting, but only a small number of people do that. Memo directs and recommends but above all it transmits information within the large bureaucratic structure organizing virtually all work in modernity.

Many people do tend to think that memo and letter are same. Memos as a modern way of writing have not evolved from the business letter but they are a new genre of writing. Memorandum as a “note to oneself” incarcerates the interpersonal communication within organization. Hence, Yates speaks of the memo as constituting an "organizational" memory and an accurate memory jogger. This sort of remembering which jolts down speakers' mind into documents liberates writing from rhetoric and creates the revolution in the history of writing which Yates rediscovered. Yates observed that expanded function of memo created some innovative way of storing written information and documents were filed by subject rather than chronology to make retrieval of documents easy. Memo has remained the focus of attention because of its shortness and; furthermore, it is addressed to specific purpose for the purpose of recording an agreement, transmitting information, making a case or enabling action (Dobel, Elmore, & Werner, 1992). It does not only become famous for only presenting reduction in word limits but also casts away “connective” tissues of paragraphs as Kate implies. Guillory (2003) gave a valid point to emphasize the modernity of memos that, “The shift from continuous prose to a graphically organized page is just as much a feature of writing in modernity”.

2.2.2. Distinction between Memos and Letters

Murphy, Hildebrandt and Thomas (1997) found the differences among memo, letters and emails. Memos are internal while letters are external. There is a difference in format as well. Identification lines in memos include 'Date', 'To', 'From', and 'Subject' while letter head has address, date, reader's address, salutation, text, complimentary close and signature. Hard copy attachment can be stapled to the memo. Complimentary copies can be sent to the other readers. For letters, additional information can be enclosed within the envelope. Memos target audience from generally high tech or low tech whereas letters are for lay readers or vendors and email addresses multiple readers. The tone of memos is bit informal as compared to letters. Format of email and memo is more or less same, whereas letter has address, salutation and signature.

2.2.3. Uses and Purposes of Memos

The uses of memos are: to convey information, to communicate between branches and to file record. Memos serve as a written record and benefit both the reader and the writer. They are used for future references. Memoranda are prepared for many different purposes. Among these routine purposes are: (1) Routine information, (2) Giving Instructions, (3) Serving as cover, (4) Making announcements. Two of these purposes are discussed below:

2.2.3.1. *Requesting information*

Three steps are involved in preparing memoranda for requesting information.

- State the key idea
- Present the key ideas
- Remind the reader of request (Lahiff & Penrose : 245)

2.2.3.2. *Giving instructions*

Those memos which are giving instructions try to cover the subject in detail so that the reader will not have any unanswered question.

2.2.4. Types of Memos

Memos are having different types and shapes. Circular, notification, and mails are form of memos. A circular is a document intended to be copied and given to a group. Also, while a memo is only to inform or remind, a circular can have other purposes such as advertising. There is a memo of understanding. A memorandum is used to document agreements (understandings) between internal departments, work units and individuals and thus the memorandum that documented these "understandings" became a "Memorandum of Understanding" or MOU. Another type is 'Memorandum of Association' that is an official document that by law shows that company exists. 'Memorandum of Deposit' is a document signed by someone who deposits something as security for a loan from a bank. 'Memorandum of Satisfaction' is a document stating that a mortgage on a property has been repaid' (Oxford Dictionary of Business English for Learners of English). 'Transmittal Memorandum' introduces the reader to a longer accompany message. Dixie lists a few memo types: Operational memos, Financial memos, Environmental memos, Announcements (policy change, meetings, etc.), Request for action, Form memos, Cover memos, Directives, Response to an inquiry, Trip report, Dress code memos. There are problem-solution memos, compare and contrast memos, student –written memos as well as professionally written memos. Moreover, memos are not exclusively communicating good news; memos sometimes provide negative information. Ideas in negative memos are